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## Despite popularity elsewhere, residents reject community gardens

South Silver Spring site removed from county plans; neighbors say they weren't involved in process

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Montgomery County's first public community gardens will come



Jeremy Arias/The Gazette

The county will offer plots in a new community garden at Sligo Mill Park in Takoma Park.

to Takoma Park and Sandy Spring next month but a proposed site for south Silver Spring was removed from plans due to complaints from residents who said the county did not involve them in the planning process.

On May 15, the county's Parks Department will open a community garden at Sligo Mill Park, which is also known as Sligo Overlook Park, on Orchard Drive in Takoma Park and another off Layhill Road in Sandy Spring, near the Red Door Country Store. A community garden is a plot of public land where local residents can purchase space to garden.

Current plans at Sligo Mill Park include 18 plots being available with residents able to purchase a 200-square-foot plot for \$25 per year or a 400-square-foot plot for \$45 per year.

The first two locations will be part of a pilot program and with demand for community gardens high, the Parks Department will determine future sites once the Takoma Park and Sandy Spring locations are up and running, said Ursula Sabia-Sukinik, community garden coordinator for Parks.

"For [Sligo Mill Park], we have a waiting list twice the amount of plots," she said. A lottery system will be conducted to decide who gets a spot. Sabia-Sukinik said 70 percent of the plots will be given to residents near the Sligo Mill Park garden.

Despite the demand across the county, the majority of residents near another proposed garden site at Silver Spring Intermediate Park, at the corner of Boston and Chicago avenues, rejected plans because the neighborhood already uses the park for recreation purposes.

"We don't need to take unstructured open green space to make community gardens," said Karen Roper, who lives in east Silver Spring near the proposed site.

Roper said the community is in favor of community gardens but when a notice went out last week with Silver Spring Intermediate as a possible site, it was the first time many residents had heard about the gardens. The community garden program was first proposed in November by Councilwoman Valerie Ervin.

Because of its terrain and the activity it receives from residents, Silver Spring Intermediate "wouldn't have been a very successful garden," said nearby resident Edith Holleman.

"I don't understand how a horticulturist can say, 'Let's put it in a place where every time it rains it floods,'" said Holleman, who is part of a community garden at Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C.

Sabia-Sukinik said a community garden site must be at a property that is owned by the Parks Department, is not environmentally sensitive, receives eight hours of sunlight per day and is not actively used for recreation. When the department examined potential sites in the winter, Silver Spring Intermediate met all those criteria. But when the department and Ervin's office met with residents last week, it was determined that recreational sports and dog walkers were too prevalent at the park to put a garden there.

"At [Silver Spring Intermediate], the pushback was so ferocious, we decided if you don't want a pilot garden in your community, other communities are lining up," said Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring.

Some residents near Silver Spring Intermediate were in favor of the gardens and Ervin said the removal of Silver Spring Intermediate would not prevent downtown Silver Spring from receiving gardens in the future.

"This is the first time I've heard this type of reaction," said Kathy Jentz, who lives a block from Silver Spring Intermediate Park and is also the editor of Washington Gardener magazine. "Usually a [civic] association will demand a garden be put in their park."

Community gardens are available at places like Woottons Mill Park in Rockville but the pilot program would be the first county-owned gardens. Community gardens are also available in surrounding counties like Howard and Frederick.

Each garden will have a kiosk with gardening information and general community news and an online group on Yahoo.com will be established for gardeners to communicate, Sabia Sukinik said. There will be gravel parking spaces at the Sandy Spring site, which is mostly removed from any residential properties.

Several community meetings are scheduled for Silver Spring and Takoma Park to present the plans.

Mostly vegetables, legal herbs and flowers will be allowed at the gardens, Sabia-Sukinik said, and the gardens will be periodically reviewed to ensure proper upkeep.

"Community gardens get all these people from different locations to come together at a central point," Sabia-Sukinik said. "They get people to meet each other."

Community meetings to discuss community gardens program in Montgomery County:

-7 p.m. Monday: Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board meeting at Silver Spring Library, 8901 Colesville Road, Silver Spring.

-7:30 p.m. Tuesday: Takoma Park Environment Committee at Takoma Park Community Center at 7500 Maple Ave. in Takoma Park.

-7:30 p.m. April 20: East Silver Spring Citizens Association meeting at Sligo Recreation Center, 500 Sligo Ave. in Silver Spring.

-8:30 p.m. April 20: Takoma Park City Council, Takoma Park Community Center at 7500 Maple Ave. in Takoma Park.

-7 p.m. April 21: North Takoma Citizens Association meeting at Montgomery College Silver Spring/Takoma Park Campus Student Services Building Room 320, Fenton Street and New York Avenue in Silver Spring.

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